

Order & Violence (Political Economy of Development)



Week 2: Conflict
Chris Blattman

Week 2 objectives

- Understand each of Fearon's three bases for conflict:
 - “Irrationality”, selfish and myopic rationality, and rationality with asymmetric information or commitment problems
- Be able to apply these concepts to diverse situations, from village disputes to civil wars
- Understand the logic of Robert Kaplan's or Amos Sawyer's diagnosis and solution in light of these three bases for conflict
- Understand major theories for why people choose to fight
 - Direct material incentives matter, but aren't sufficient to explain most participation in most conflicts
 - Club goods help explain more
 - But the social and psychological incentives and club goods are needed to make sense of fighting: injustice, parochial altruism, ...

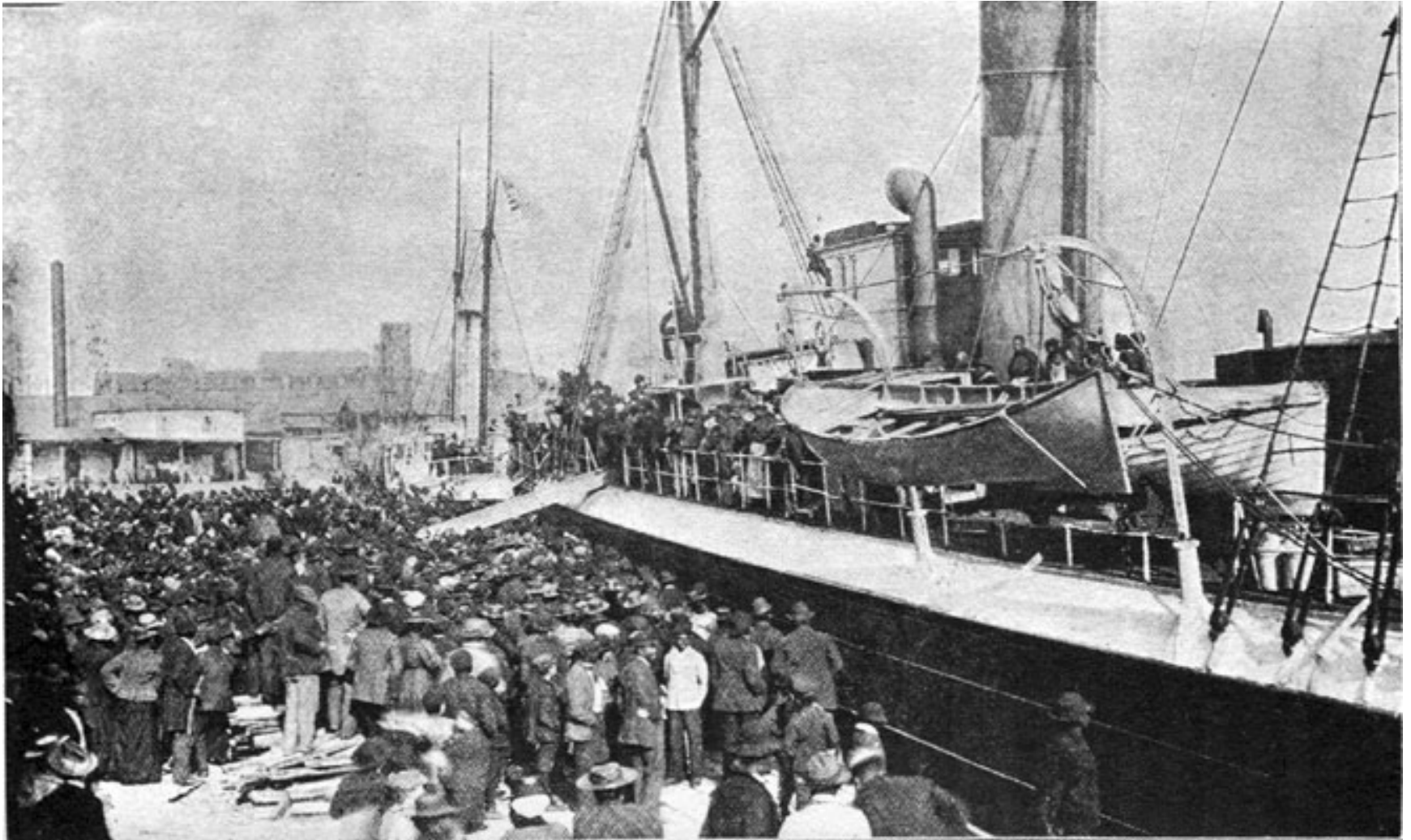
Part I:

Why does conflict occur?

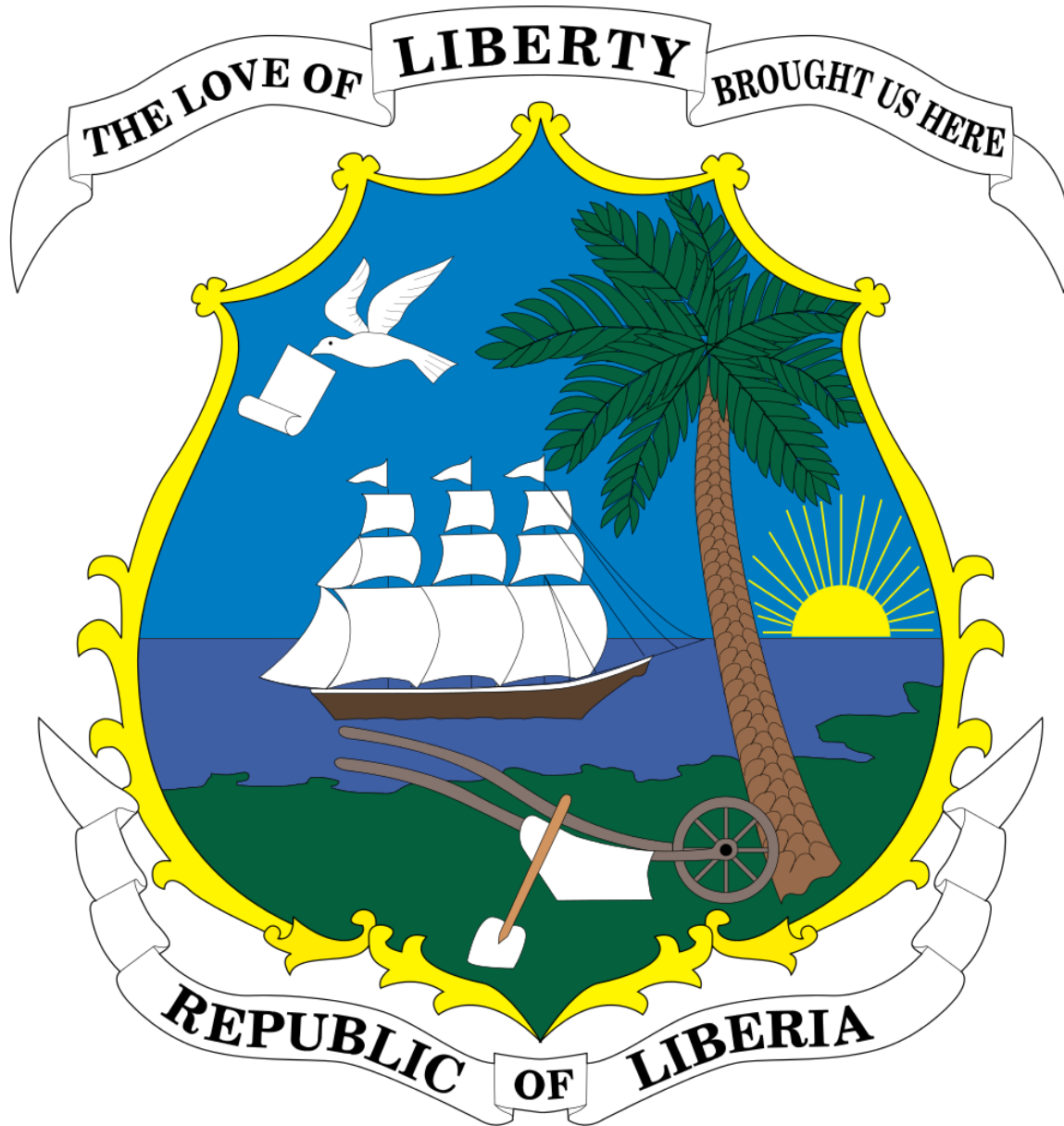
Let's go back to Liberia, but now we're going to talk about the big picture



The 19th century Back-to-Africa movement



Departure of the Back-to-Africa Movement ship *Laurada* bound for Liberia with approximately 300 passengers, half of them from Arkansas; [March 1896](#).



Liberia: Longstanding fragilities and cleavages

- Stateless, diverse region before settlement
- Americo-Liberian colonization (1821-1847) and dominance of national politics
- Oligarchy dominated country through patron-client relations and military control
- Relative exclusion of indigenous tribes
- Tensions between indigenous tribes
 - Between neighboring ethnic groups
 - Between Christian/traditional “citizens” and Muslim “newcomers”
- Centralized, patrimonial but functional regime
- Strong US support during Cold War

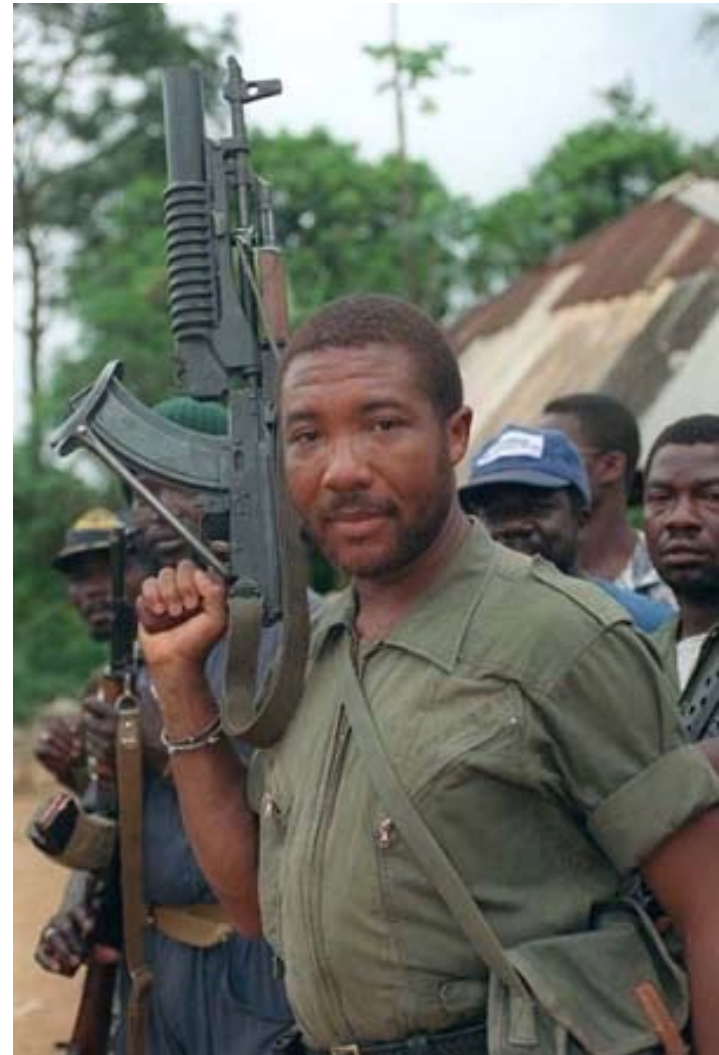
1980-89: Military rule



- (Indigenous) Samuel Doe overthrows government in a coup
- Has US support and aid
- Increasingly brutal and repressive rule
- Loses aid and military support with end of Cold War

Charles Taylor and the invasion of Liberia, 1989

- US intelligence agents reportedly help Charles Taylor escape from a maximum security prison in Boston in 1985
- Received guerrilla training and funding from Libya and Cote d'Ivoire
- Leads 100 soldiers over Cote d'Ivoire border, igniting a civil war
- Fails to capture the capital





1990-1994

“World War I” and “World War II”



1990-1996

1999-2003

Civil war or regional geo-political conflict?





2003-2009

What explains this level of madness?



1990-1996

1999-2003

Fearon suggests three reasons why there could be conflict

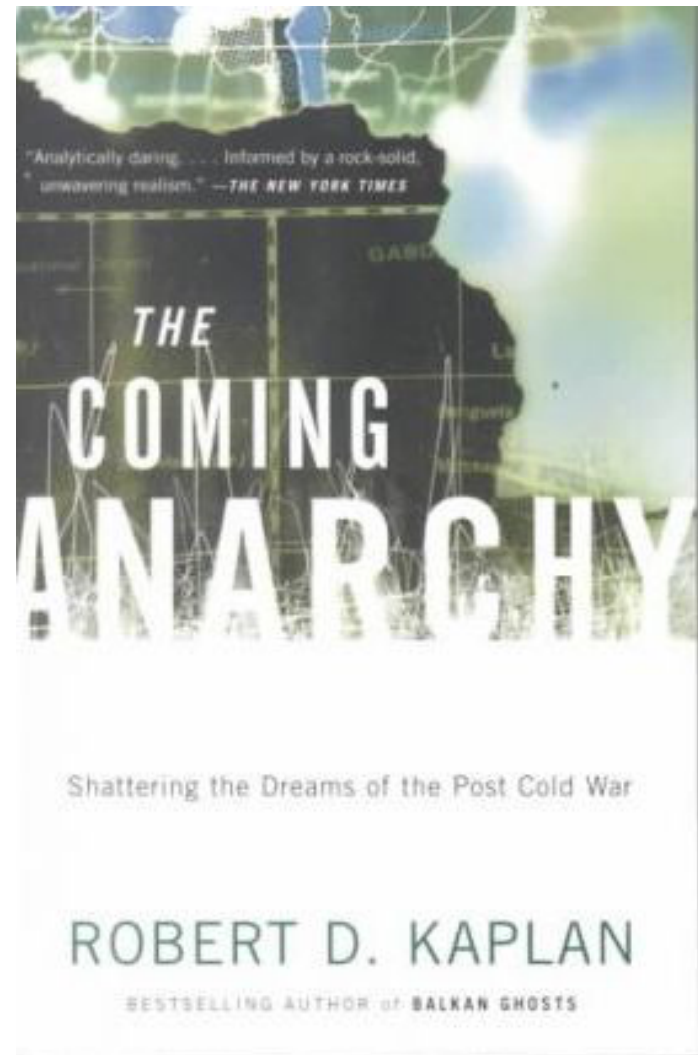
1. Leaders (or societies) are irrational
 - e.g. Barbaric impulses, megalomania, overconfidence, ...
2. Leaders are rational, but don't internalize the broader costs of war
 - Akin to the roving/stationary bandit model above
3. “Rationalist warfare”: Even rational leaders who do internalize costs will still go to war under some circumstances
 - When there is asymmetric information
 - When there is a commitment problem

He notes that the first two can probably explain most conflict. Even Liberia?

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A common journalistic response to the wars in the Mano River region: Irrational barbarism

- Crime and lawlessness spreading
- State control and communal norms weakening
- An underlying barbaric nature unleashed
- Compounded by younger, more urban, rootless populations
- Compounded by environmental degradation and disease



Political science likes to
dismiss this irrationality, but
it's something we can't ignore

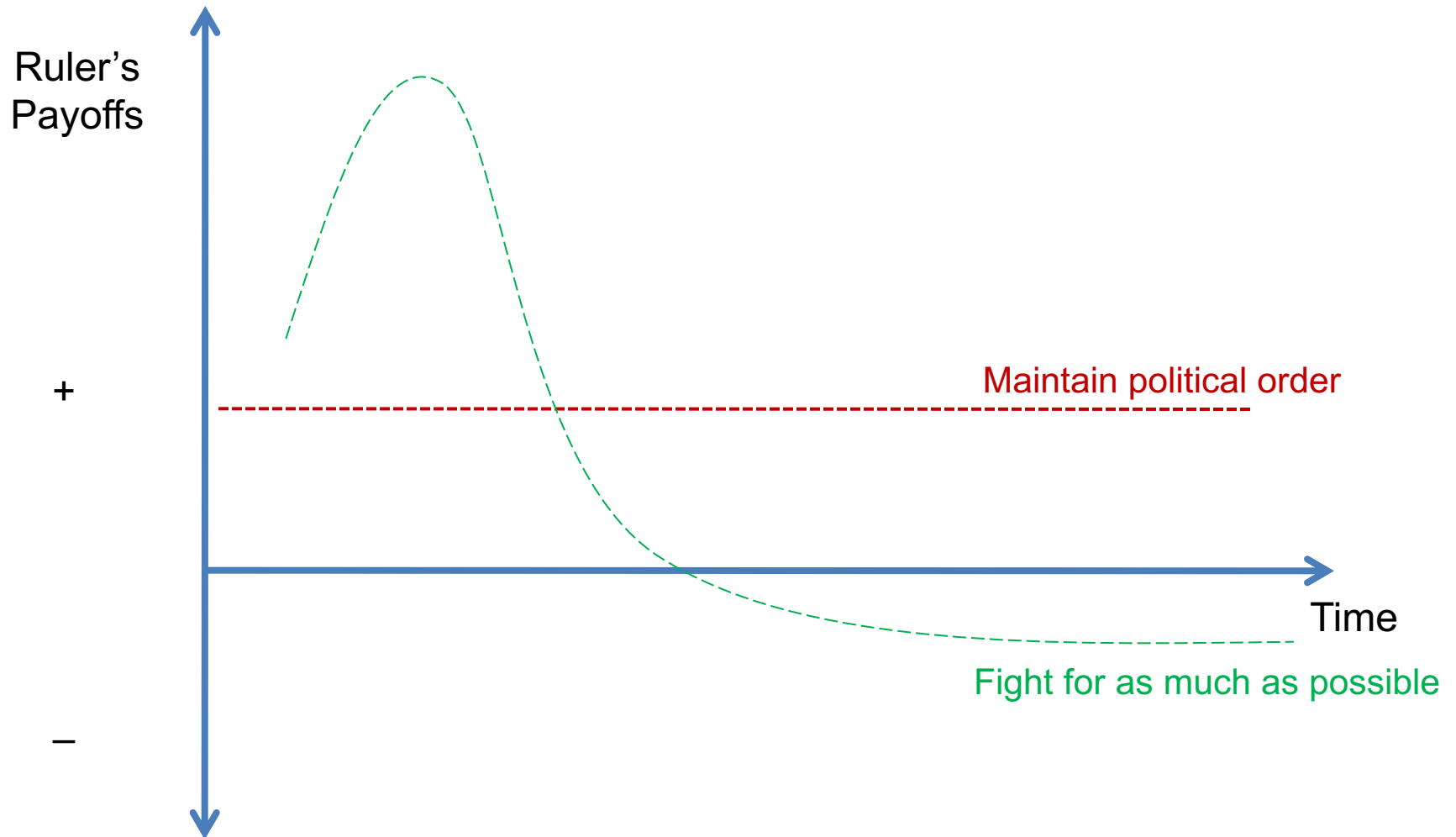
Systematic irrationality (e.g.
overconfidence bias) is understudied

But I personally find the second more persuasive

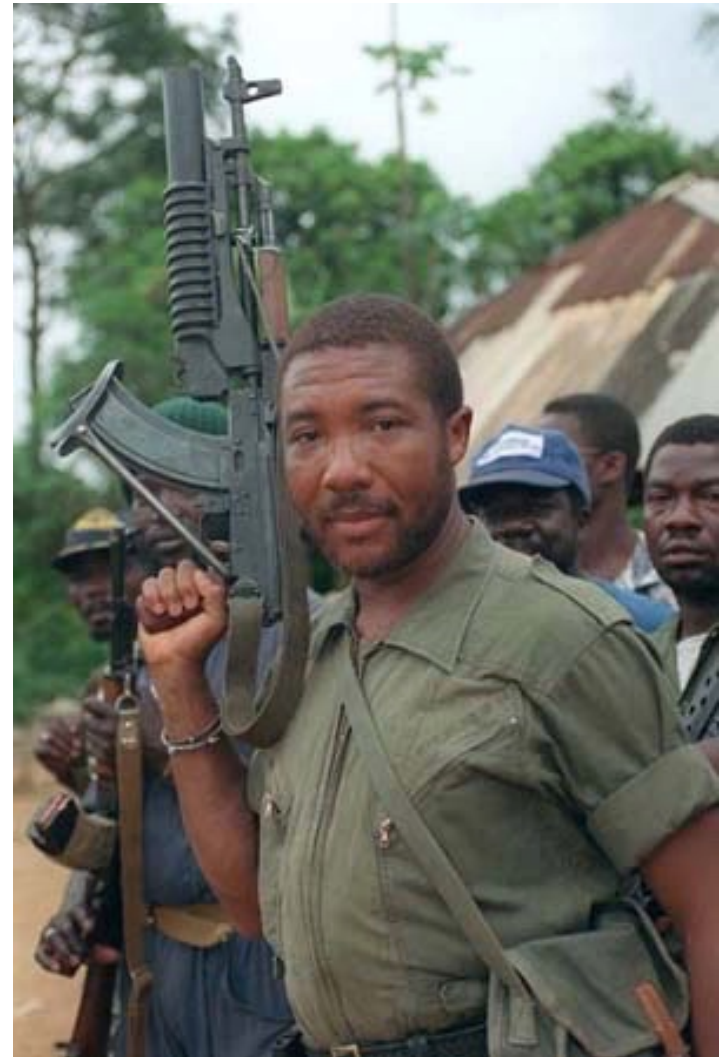
Selfish narrow-minded leaders get us pretty far

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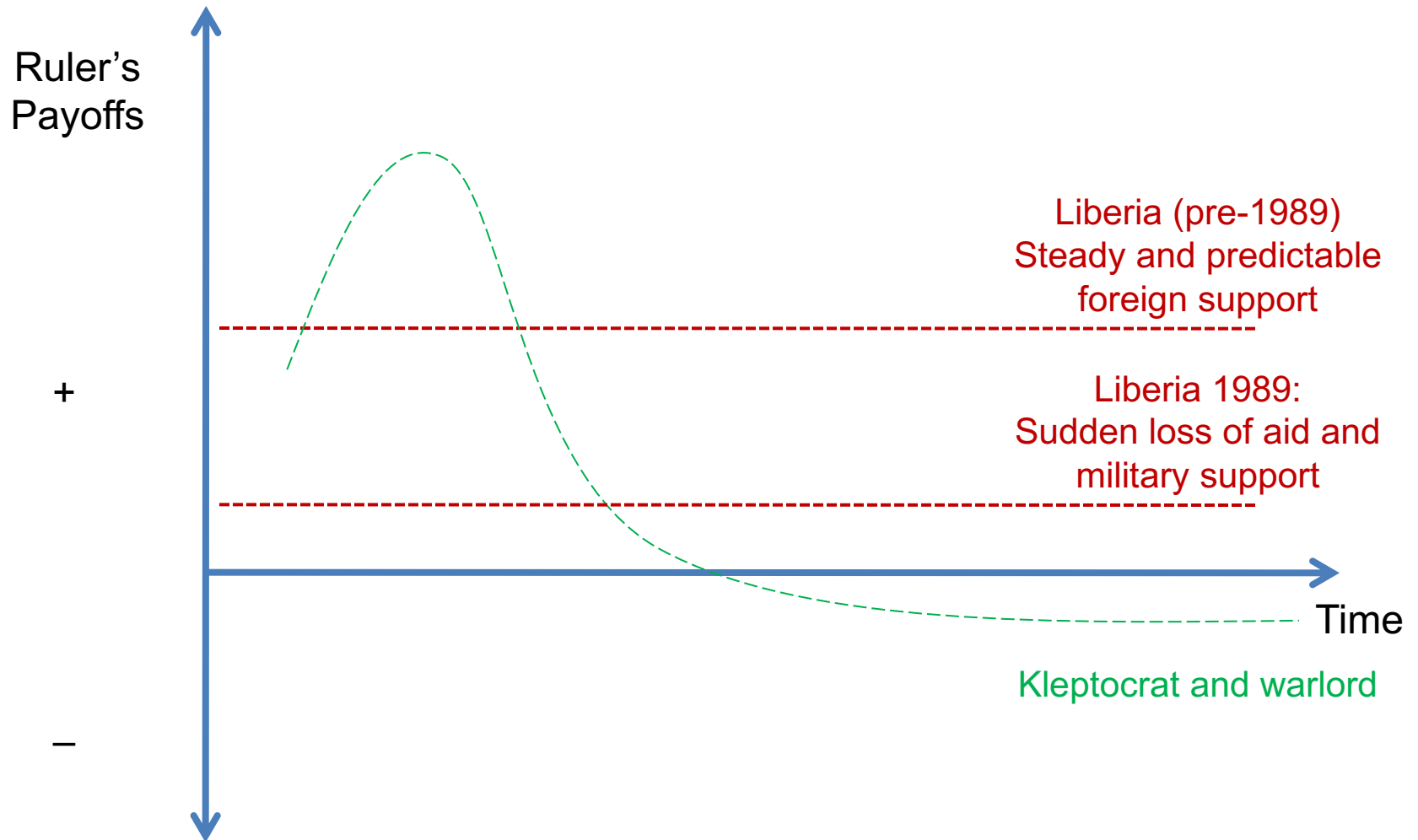
This is basically a model of selfish, rational, maximizing leaders who choose looting because they don't internalize the costs



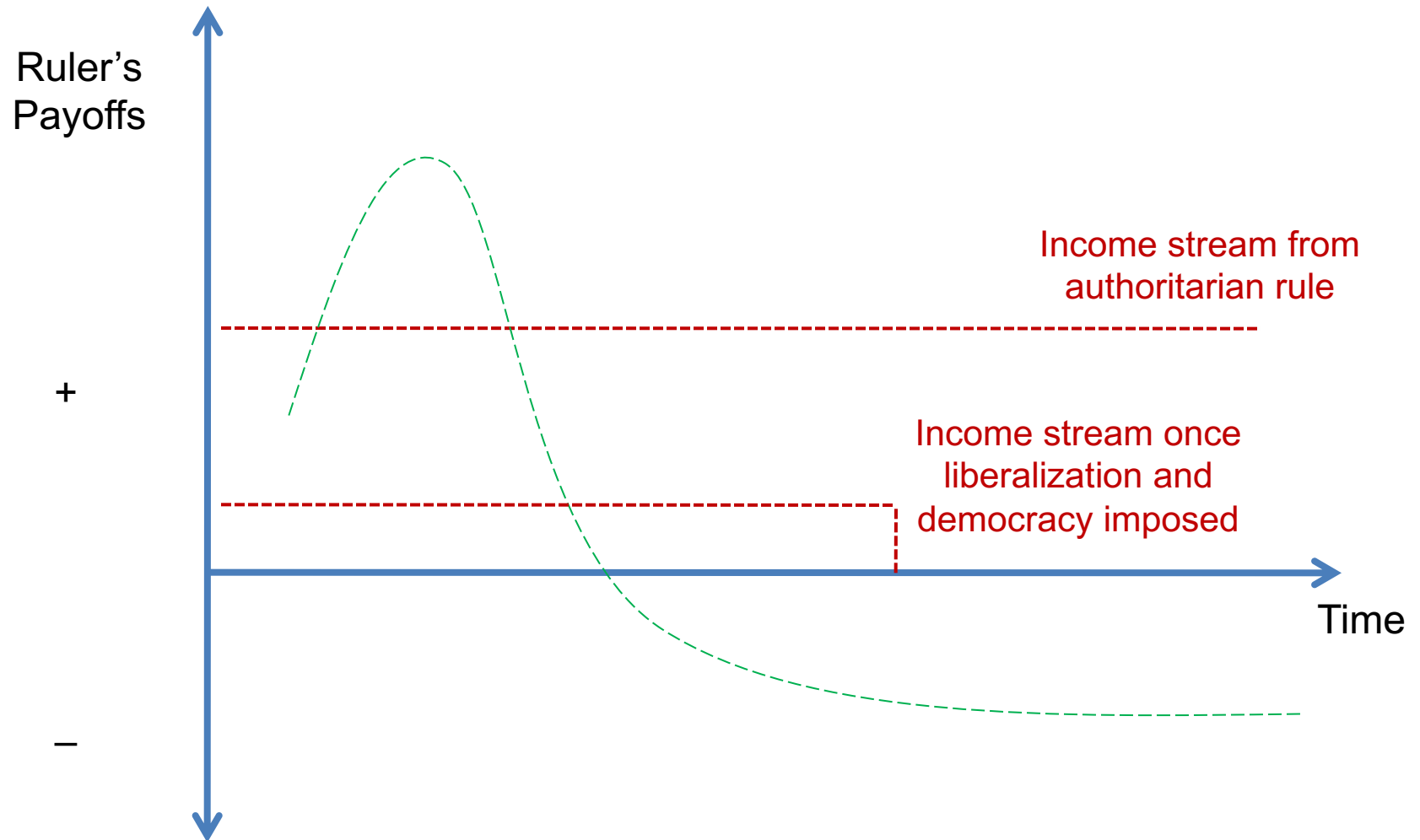
Plausibly, both Doe and Taylor ignored the social costs of conflict. Taylor especially was a calculating, skilled leader



- i. End of Cold War support
- ii. Little punishment of war crime



Later, increasing pressures for liberalization and democratization on the continent

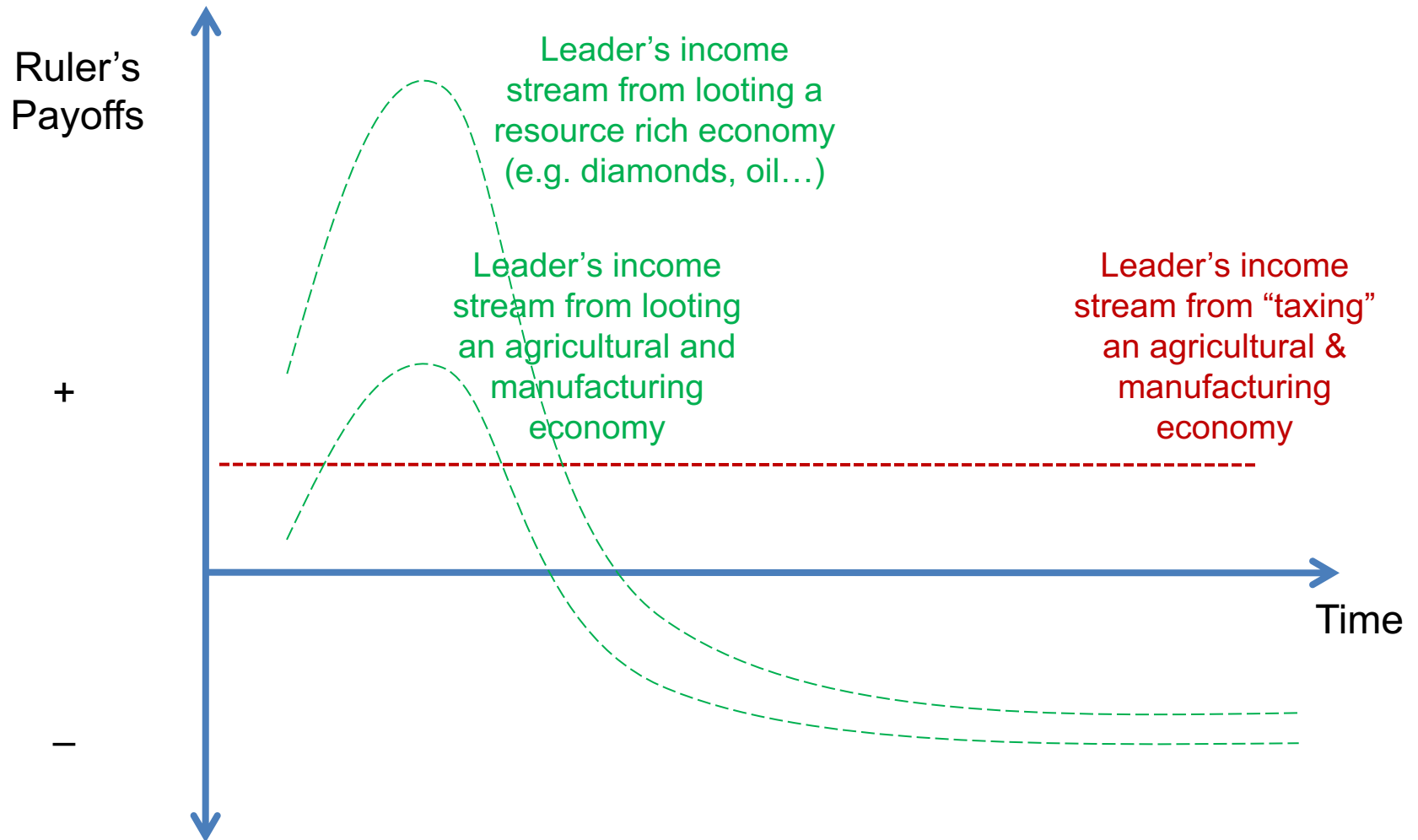


A role for natural resources?

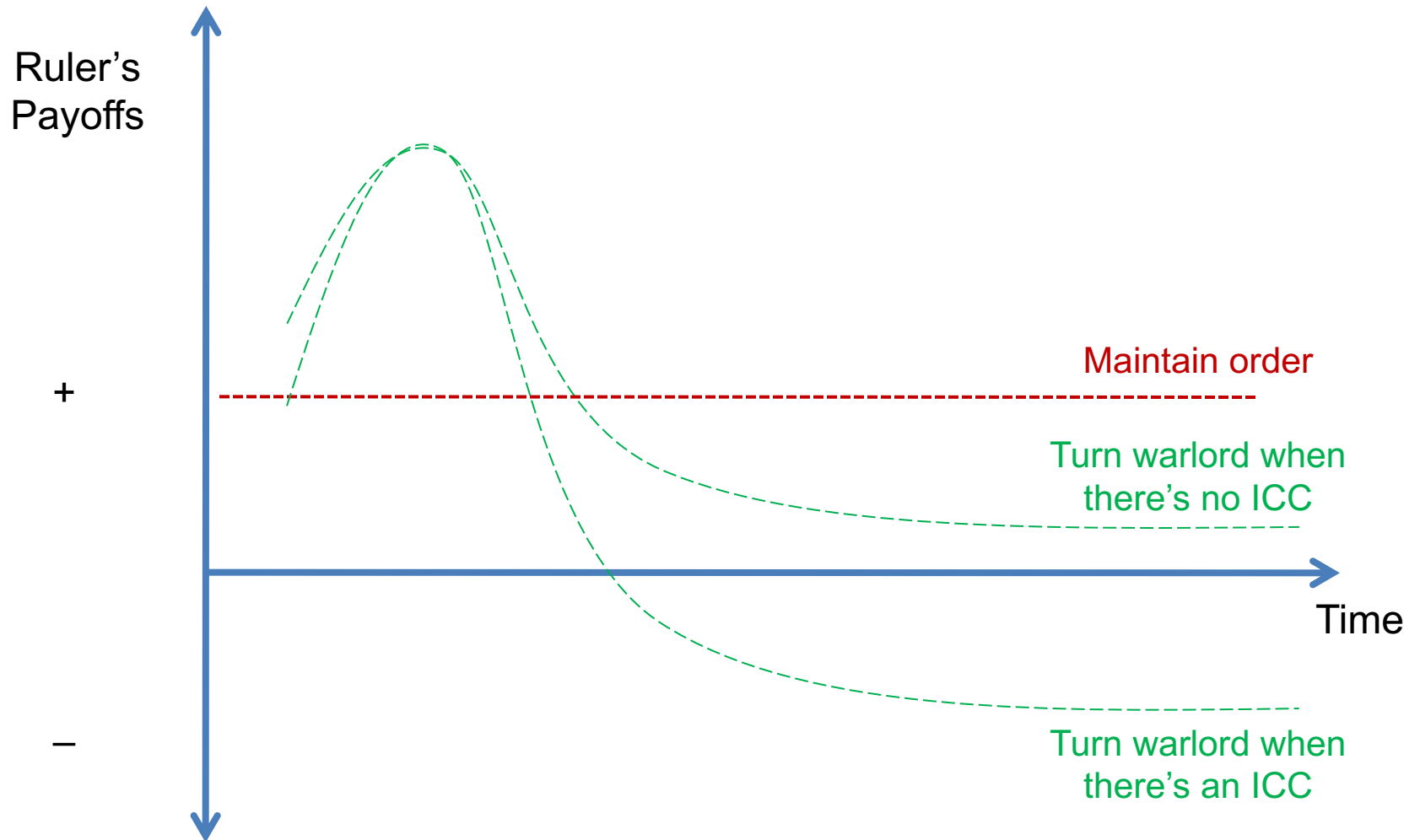


Some resources are more lootable than others

High-value, highly-concentrated minerals that do not require complex extraction or processing



The role of international justice



But still I think irrationality and myopia are only part of the story

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Fearon's puzzle: Violence is inefficient

1. Fighting is costly
2. Any peaceful outcome is better for all parties than the outcomes following a war
3. There is a bargained outcome that is better for everyone
4. Rational, fully informed actors should not fight (unless they do not internalize the costs)

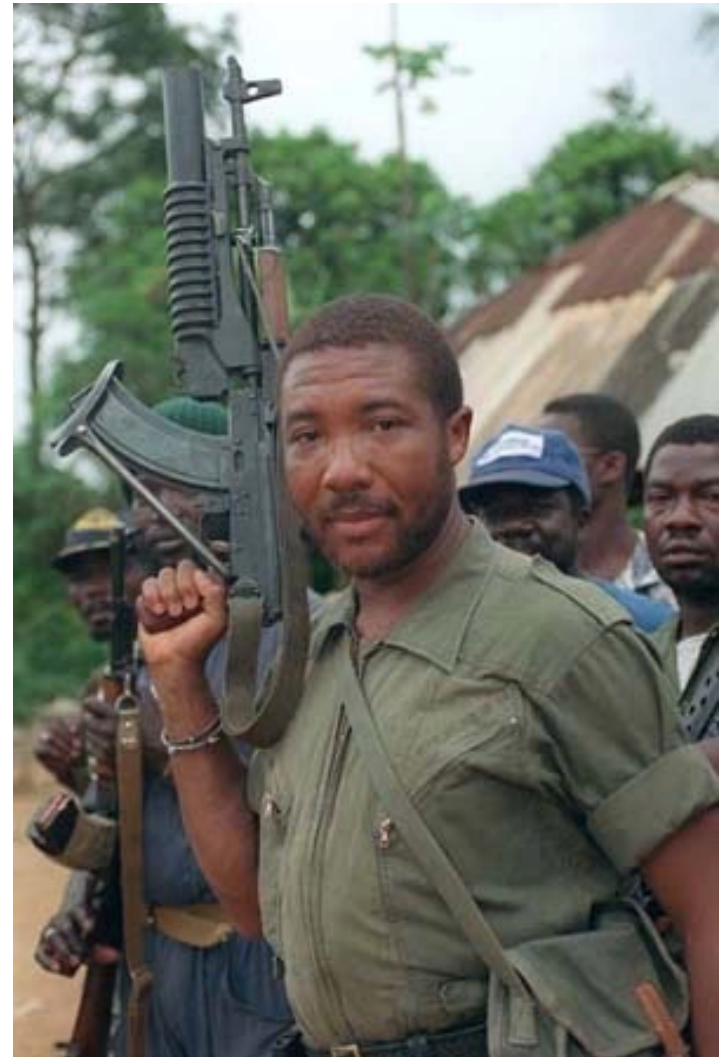
This is what “inefficiency” looked like in Liberia



Why did Charles Taylor invade, then continue to battle with other rebel groups?

Why not bargain?

- Irrational?
 - Overconfident
 - Megalomaniac
- Fails to internalize costs?
 - Highly plausible
- Information asymmetries and commitment problems?



Why do bargains break down (in general)?

1. Asymmetric information

- We each know our own strength and cost of holding out or fighting, but not the other person's
- Optimal strategy is to hold out or to test each other's strength
- Need something to prevent us from communicating (since we have a mutual interest in reducing asymmetries)

2. Commitment problem

- There exists a bargain, but we cannot trust the other party to uphold it
- Range of enforceable bargains that avoid fighting could be small or zero
- If you think power will shift in future, you have an incentive to strike now

Why might bargains have broken down in Liberia?

Information asymmetries

- Regime (Doe) did not know strength of insurgent (Taylor)
 - And insurgents may have incentives for secrecy (e.g. surprise)
- Few institutions for information exchange and dialogue
 - Domestic ones destroyed intentionally
 - International institutions in chaos
- Poorly forecast the length and depth and depravity of the conflict

Commitment problem

- Power highly centralized in Liberia
 - Regime cannot credibly commit to sharing power
 - Insurgents can't credibly commit to giving regime elites a continued share of the spoils
- Ending of aid makes regime suddenly weak
 - Temporarily vulnerable to a first strike
- Opportunity to permanently reduce power of opposing group
 - Ethnic cleansing

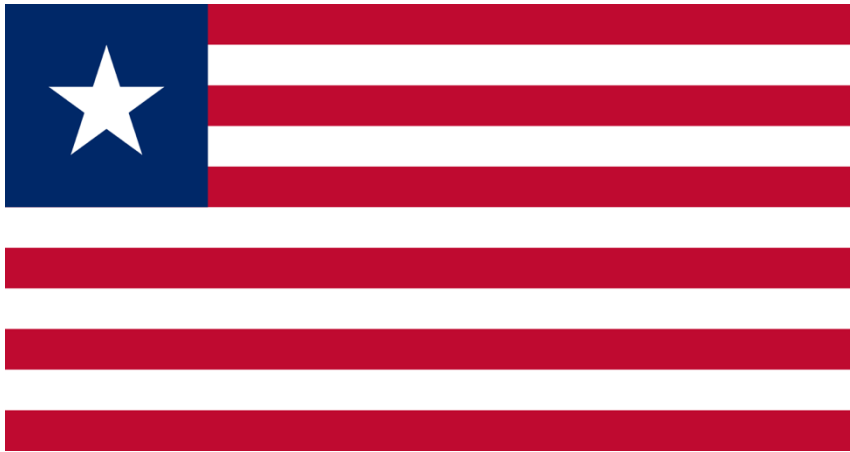
“Institutions” of conflict resolution ought to reduce information asymmetries and improve commitment

In weak states...

- Informal institutions are weak
 - Competing authorities and norms
 - Traditional norms may be unequal
- Formal institutions function poorly
 - Civil and criminal courts corrupt, expensive and inaccessible
 - Competing and inconsistent bodies
 - Police untrained, immobile, and corrupt
 - Legal rules and laws unclear, unavailable



People employ this theory of conflict in very different scenarios



Why did the 13 colonies choose to rebel? Why didn't Britain grant America representation?

- Rebellion was dangerous for U.S. elites and their children
- The US colonies were prosperous, paid fewer taxes than other British subjects, and weren't covering the cost of their own defense
- Many were ready to accept further taxation if given representation
- Why didn't Britain grant it to settle the dispute?



Galliani and Torrens: There was a commitment problem

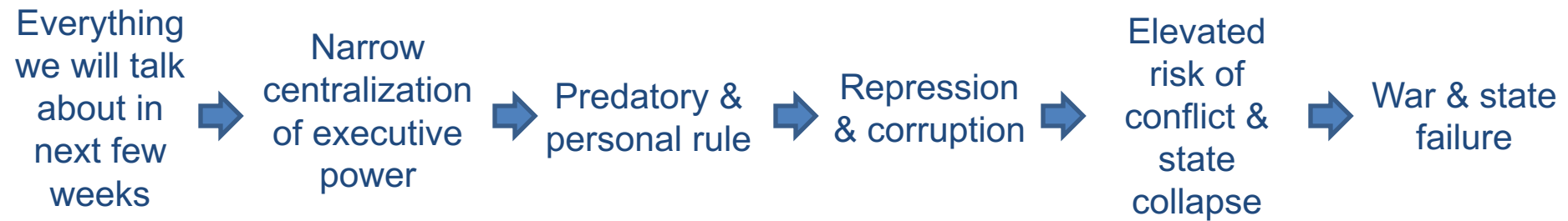
- You could give “irrational” explanations
 - Commitment to principles
- You could argue that British and colonial elites didn’t internalize the costs of war
 - Especially British elites, whose children were not fighting, and whose land was not at risk
 - Or colonial (US) merchants who stood more to gain from independent trade policy than they could lose
- British order “threatened”
 - The selectorate was dominated by landed gentry
 - Urban bourgeoisie was demanding a say
 - British landowners were afraid that giving the colonial representation would lead to more democratic reforms
- Colonial elites could not credibly commit to stop such reforms, and British elite could not commit to not rolling back concessions

Let's go back to the example of Liberia



Amos Sawyer's case study of the Mano River basin

Tells a parallel story of over-centralization of power



I'd argue centralization matters for all three reasons for warfare

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Why?

1. Reduces incentives to internalize costs of conflict
 - Decentralized power usually means more people have a say in how the country is run, representing more interests
 - A wider “selectorate”
2. Accentuates risk
 - Of an erratic leader pushing a nation to warfare
 - Raises value of capturing state
 - Repression and patronage a source of grievance and injustice
3. Enhances the commitment problem
 - No checks and balances on power

In this light, what kinds of interventions and processes can sustain order?

What pushes leaders to internalize costs?

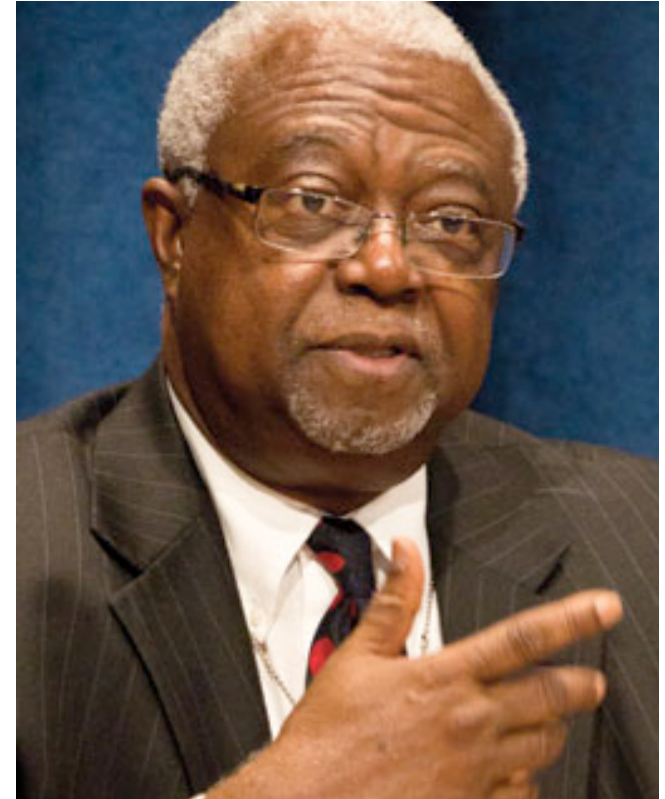
What helps enforce bargains?

What constrains power?

The need for sustainable bargains

“ Experience has shown that the critical challenge is not simply to provide incentives to ensure cooperation among antagonistic armed groups and to hold elections. Angola and Liberia provide evidence to the contrary.

More deeply, the challenge includes understanding the conflict, and creating and implementing appropriate peace settlements that have the potential to support processes of democratic peace-building and the constitution of post-conflict governance arrangements, on principles and along patterns that depart from approaches that have failed.



Argues for a set of constraining institutions

- Government must be accountable at multiple levels (polycentric)
 - Empower local government jurisdictions (elections, budgetary power)
 - Independent, task-specific bureaucracies crossing space
 - Regional security and economic apparatus
- Echoes elements of European and American constitutional principles:
 - E pluribus unum, Checks and balances
- We will come back to this again in institutions and state-building discussions

Closely follows Walter's argument that political and legal institutions prevent the repeated outbreak of violence

- Civil wars are more likely to repeat in countries where:
 - Government elites are unaccountable to the public
 - The public does not participate in political life
 - Information is not transparent.
- Greater institutionalization serves four purposes.
 1. Check executive power, creating governments that serve the interests of a wider population
 2. Create multiple nonviolent avenues to influence government policy, making renewed violence less essential for change
 3. Strong institutions help incumbent elites credibly commit to the political terms of a peace settlement, making bargains more likely
 4. Credible checks on executive power mean rebels need not maintain militias and the threat of violence to hold political elites in line

The reservations I have about Sawyer and Walter

1. I don't know where these checks and balances will come from
 - There is usually no political will
 - One wonders if they would like them imposed from without, “neo-colonially”
2. Are rule changes enough if the actual basis of power in these societies haven't changed?
 - What if the elite still control most of the wealth?
 - What if the military is still only accountable to the executive?

What role for peacekeeping in rationalist warfare?



We'll return to these examples and subjects later in the class when we talk about institution building and peacekeeping/military intervention

Part II:
Interlude for Wikipedia
assignments

What should an encyclopedia do?

- A collection of information from primary and secondary sources
- Assembled into articles that provide a general overview
- Should be used as a starting point
- Helps you find high-quality primary and secondary sources
- Also discover related topics

The first assignment

- Be bold! Add an insight to an existing Wikipedia article
- Also please feel free to:
 - Copy edit and improve citations
 - Flag problems such as “citation needed” or non-neutral coverage
 - Link to other Wikipedia articles
 - Add discussion or flag items to do to a talk page
- How to minimize duplication?
 - There will be a Google doc to sign up for a particular Wikipedia article and indicate what reading(s) you will use
 - No more than 2 people per Wikipedia article-reading combination (more ok for the review articles)
 - First-come, first-serve basis
- Make sure you are signed in when you make the edits

Some suggestions to find new material

- Use one of the review articles
 - e.g. Blattman & Miguel on civil war, Blattman & Ralston on employment in fragile states; Berman & Matanock on Insurgency
 - Many of the recommended readings in Week 3: Besley & Naidu; Berwick & Christia; Vu; Spruyt; Johnson & Koyama; Dinecco
 - Anything from: Journal of Economic Literature, Journal of Economic Perspectives, Annual Review of Economics, Annual Review of Political Science
- Use one of the readings from Week 4 or ahead
- Use one of the recommended readings
- (With TA approval) use a related reading off the syllabus
- Search for non-obvious pages

Searching for articles

- Explore around
- Search for topic areas
 - Organized crime
 - Rebellion
 - Peacekeeping
 - State building
- Look under “See also”
- Add to author pages of authors (if it exists)
- Add to a book or article page (if it exists)
- Integrate in a country/event page
 - American Revolution
 - Conflict in the Congo
 - Pick any conflict
- Read and integrate a critique of a course reading
- Read and integrate something important that builds on a course reading
 - Use Google Scholar

Evaluating the quality of an article

- Reliable sources?
- Too general? Too detailed/specific?
- Neutral coverage?
- Clear structure?
- Balance of topics?
- Missing aspects?
- Quality of lead section?
- Vague groups of people? (e.g. "Many people...")
- Article too long relative to its importance?

Example



WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

- Main page
- Contents
- Featured content
- Current events
- Random article
- Donate to Wikipedia
- Wikipedia store

- Interaction
 - Help
 - About Wikipedia
 - Community portal
 - Recent changes
 - Contact page

- Tools
 - What links here
 - Related changes
 - Upload file
 - Special pages
 - Permanent link
 - Page information
 - Wikidata item
 - Cite this page

- Print/export
 - Create a book
 - Download as PDF

Article Talk Read Edit View history ★ More ▾

Wikimedia 2030: Participate in the conversation about the future of the Wikimedia movement and its projects CLOSE X
[\[Help with translations!\]](#)

The Coming Anarchy

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from [Coming Anarchy](#))

The Coming Anarchy: How scarcity, crime, overpopulation, tribalism, and disease are rapidly destroying the social fabric of our planet is an influential article written by journalist [Robert D. Kaplan](#), which was first published in the February 1994 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*. It is considered to be one of the fundamental theses on the state of current world affairs in the [post Cold War era](#), and is ranked on the same level of doctrinal importance as [Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations](#) and [Francis Fukuyama's The End of History and the Last Man](#) theses.^[*citation needed*] U.S. President [Bill Clinton](#) reportedly recommended the article to White House staff.^[1] It has also been criticized as a [Malthusian](#) reading of the world, for blaming the situation on its victims and for overlooking alleged political and economical causes such as [neoliberal policy](#).^[2]

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The original article [edit]

Fukuyama believed that the end of the [Cold War](#) would bring about a new era of peace in world affairs. Kaplan argued that the [Cold War](#) was the closest the world would ever get to [Utopia](#). The new struacles were no longer neatly ideological. but cultural and historical. New tensions such as population increases. urbanization.

Part III:
Who fights? Why rebel?

Let's review theories of individual-level participation

- Why would an individual-level theory help understand war at the society level?
 - Affects the cost of mobilization and hence the intensity of conflict
 - This in turn could affect the probability conflict breaks out, or that arming turns to fighting



The collective action problem in war

- Classic formulation:
 - The benefits from revolution are enjoyed by all
 - The costs are incurred by those who fight
 - So why fight?
- Economically rational answer: Insurgencies create “selective incentives”
 - Rewards
 - Social sanctions
 - Coercion



Material selective incentives: Greed and the opportunity cost of going to war

- There is a simple, individually rational economic answer:
 - When the returns to returns to predating exceed the returns to producing
 - i.e. when the opportunity cost of joining a rebellion is low
- Began as a theory of crime (e.g. Gary Becker)
- The evidence suggests these incentives matter, but only somewhat



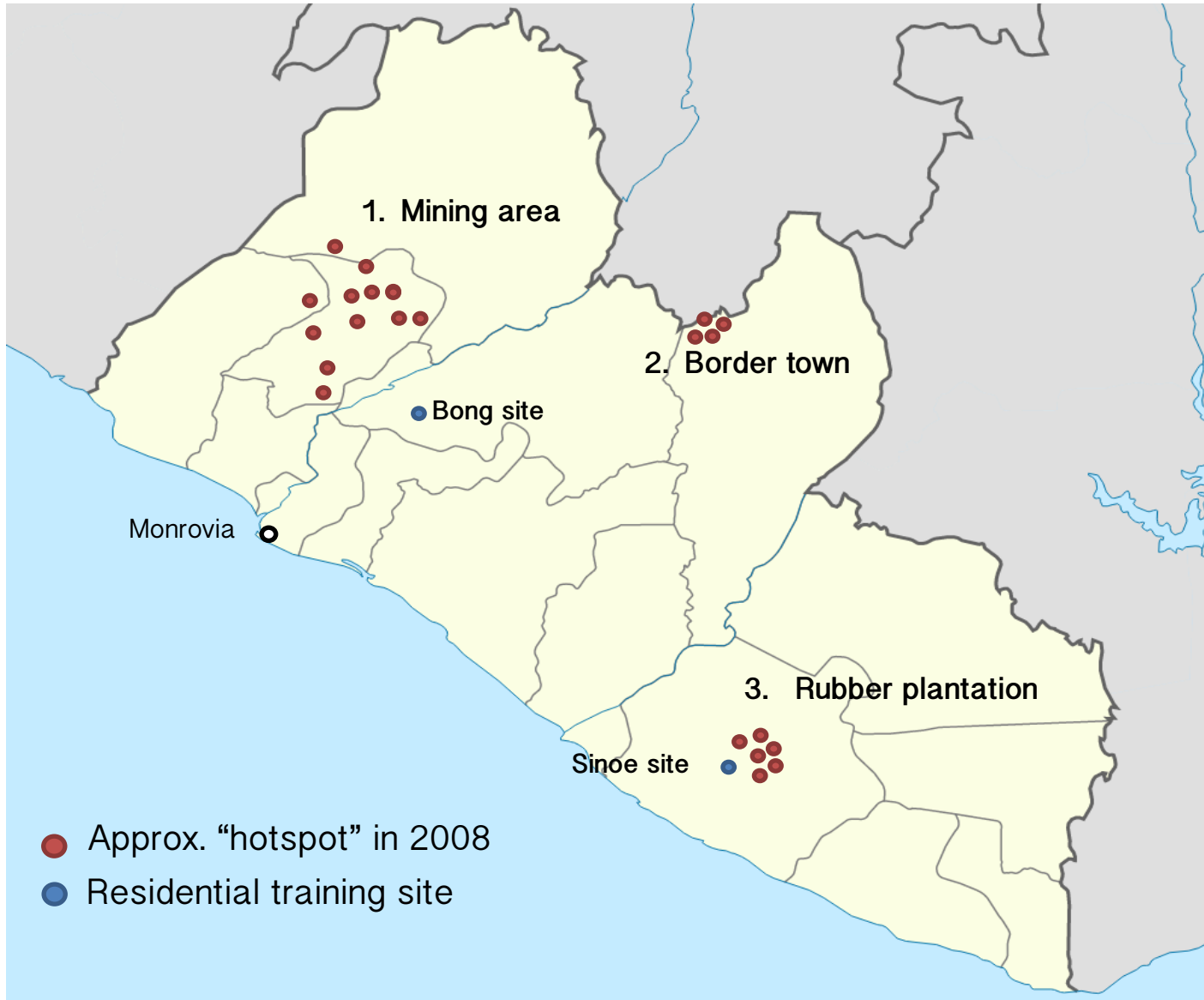
Can economic incentives really change participation in conflict? The case of Liberia

- Very low opportunity cost
 - No peaceful production
- Also, lootable resources (gold, diamonds) could be promised as rewards



Target population

High-risk ex-combatants in UN-designated “hotspots”







How to get youth out of illegal work in Liberia?

Illicit mining, rubber tapping, logging

Mercenary recruitment to Guinea or Cote d'Ivoire



Give skills and inputs to be farmers?

Half offered 4 mo training and \$125 in inputs

Assumption: Main constraint is skills/knowledge



Most youth specialize in vegetables or pig/poultry raising

Highest return, fastest cash flow activities

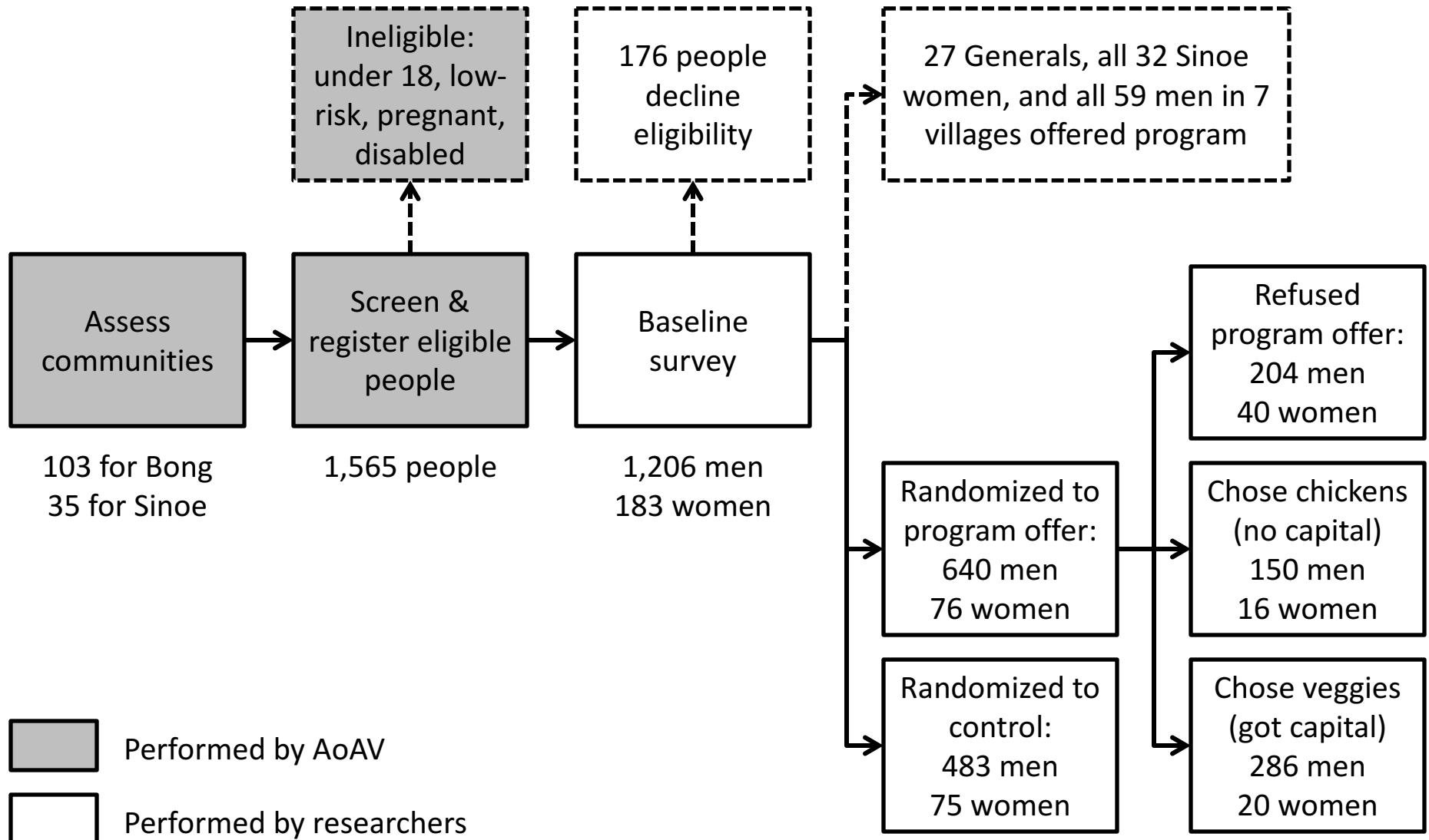
Also trained in rice, palm, and other animals



External supply problem causes variation in capital inputs

60% choose vegetables, receive seeds and tools. 28% choose pig and poultry, did not receive animals.

Randomized evaluation with >1000 high-risk men



Results

A shift towards legal occupations by ~20%

| Dependent variable | Control Mean | TOT estimate | |
|---|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| | | Coefficient | SE |
| Agricultural engagement | | | |
| Engaged in agriculture now | 0.61 | 0.155 | [0.036]*** |
| Number of acres under cultivation | 4.43 | 2.037 | [2.573] |
| Hours worked per week (in past month) | 49.33 | 1.278 | [2.824] |
| Illicit resource extraction | 15.57 | -3.697 | [1.593]** |
| Legal activities | 33.77 | 4.975 | [2.852]* |
| Farming and animal-raising | 11.91 | 4.090 | [1.415]*** |
| Farming | 10.45 | 3.423 | [1.242]*** |
| Animal-raising | 1.46 | 0.667 | [0.609] |
| Participation in illicit activities | | | |
| Engages in any illicit resource extraction | 0.40 | -0.032 | [0.038] |
| Sells any soft or hard drugs (indicator) | 0.02 | -0.010 | [0.013] |
| Index of stealing/theft activity (z-score) [†] | -0.05 | 0.060 | [0.077] |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1



Reduced mercenary recruitment

Again, contingent on receiving capital and economic success

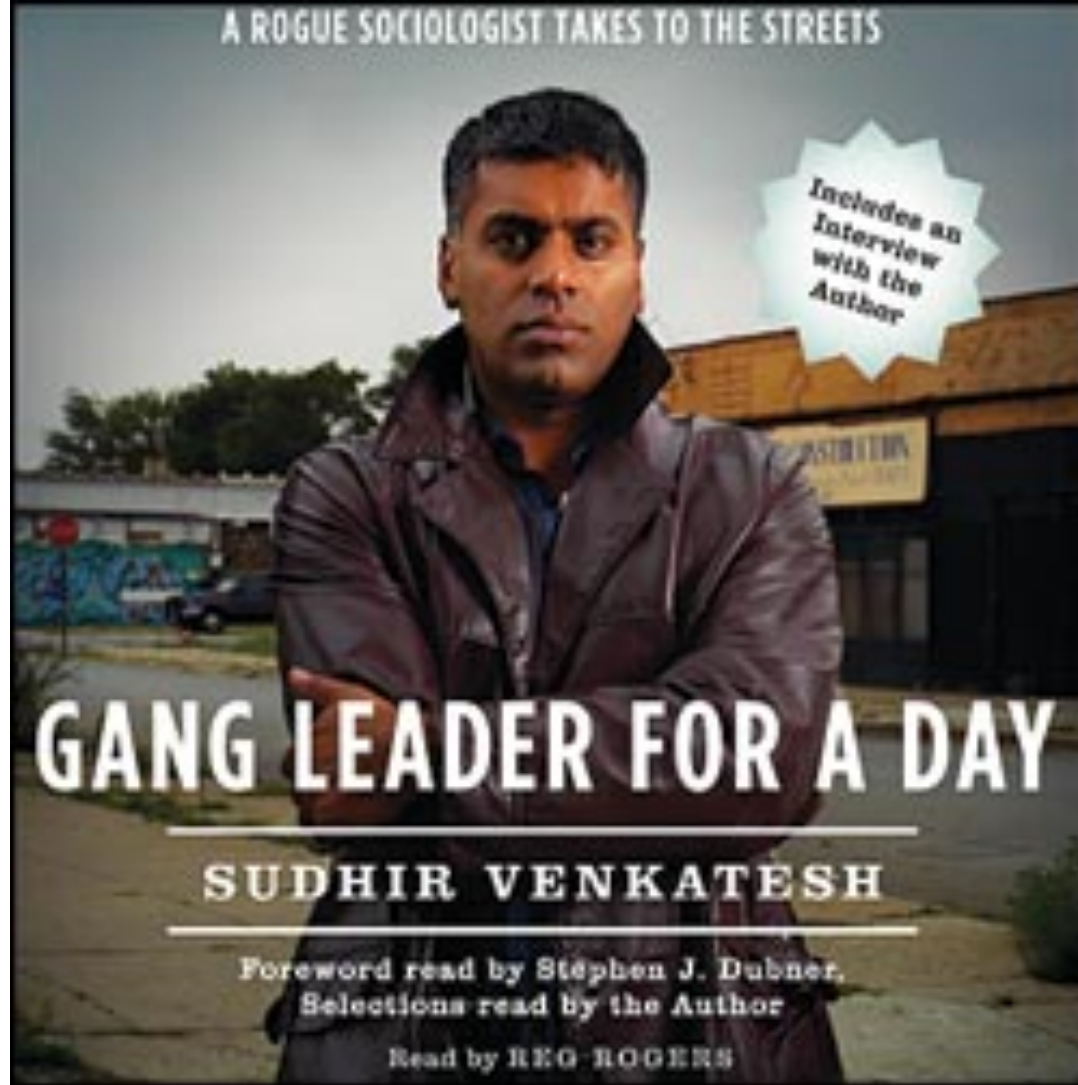
Impact on self-reported mercenary recruitment

| Dependent variable | Control | TOT estimate | |
|--|---------|--------------|------------|
| | Mean | Coeff. | SE |
| Index of mobilization risk (z-score) | 0.10 | -0.186 | [0.074]** |
| Has a partisan preference in CI | 0.66 | -0.117 | [0.041]*** |
| Talked to a commander in last 3 months | 0.45 | -0.108 | [0.044]** |
| Would go if called to fight for tribe | 0.05 | -0.015 | [0.013] |
| Talks about the CI violence with friends | 0.68 | -0.046 | [0.041] |
| Knows people who have gone to CI to fight | 0.10 | -0.021 | [0.019] |
| Has been approached about going to CI | 0.07 | 0.001 | [0.021] |
| Knows people given money to go to CI | 0.04 | 0.026 | [0.016] |
| Would go to CI for \$250 | 0.01 | -0.006 | [0.010] |
| Would go to CI for \$500 | 0.03 | -0.009 | [0.012] |
| Would go to CI for \$1000 | 0.05 | -0.032 | [0.017]* |
| Plans to move towards CI border area | 0.10 | -0.022 | [0.024] |
| Invited to secret meeting about going to CI | 0.04 | 0.004 | [0.016] |
| Attended secret meeting about going to CI | 0.03 | -0.013 | [0.011] |
| Was promised money to go to CI | 0.03 | 0.001 | [0.014] |
| Willing to fight if war breaks out in CI | 0.04 | -0.018 | [0.015] |
| Has plans to go to CI in the next month | 0.01 | -0.012 | [0.009] |
| Index of mobilization risk without "Partisan preference" or "Talked to former commander" | 0.58 | -0.155 | [0.067]** |

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

But why choose between these two?



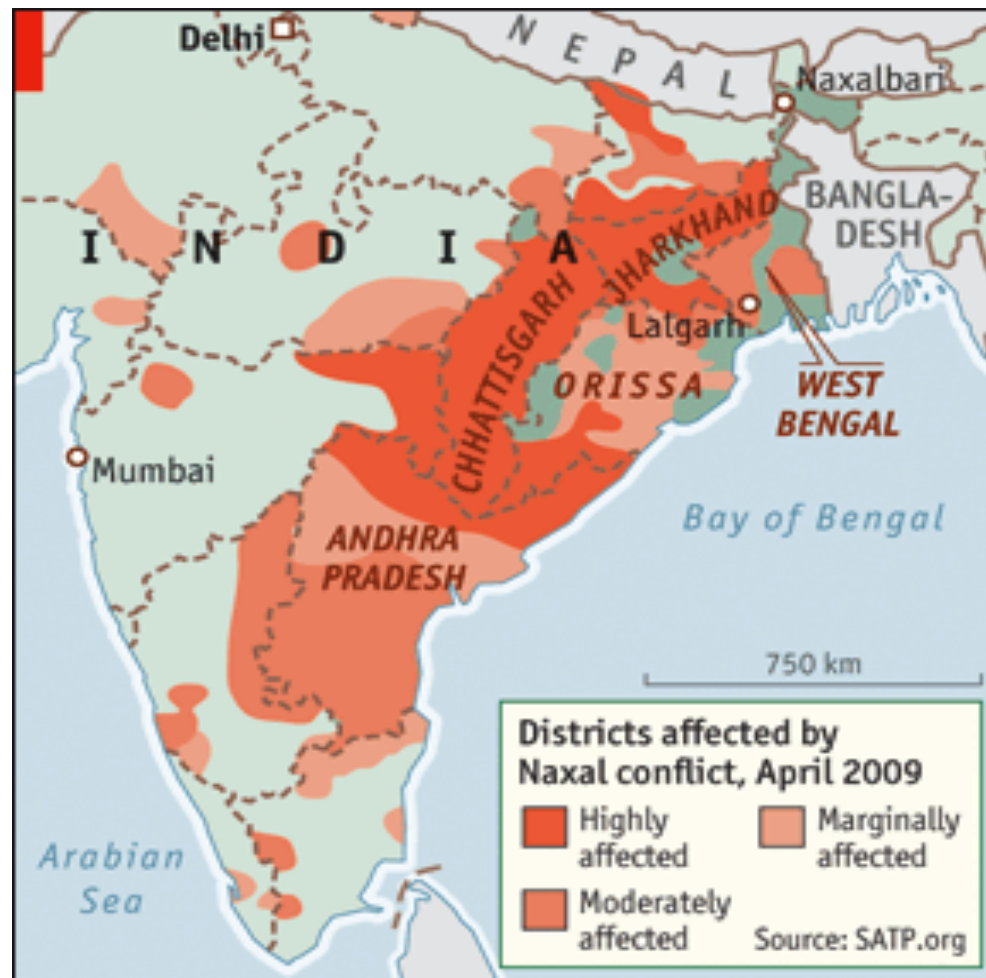


Liberian miners and mercenaries, like Chicago drug dealers, hedge their bets

Better agricultural wages shifted the amount of time they spend in illicit activities, but they didn't exit. Too risky.

What do I take away from these studies?

1. Better employment opportunities will probably reduce the kinds of crime and violence that pay
 - But only some conflicts have economic roots
2. Even then, the relationship between economic incentives and crime/conflict is modest
3. Also, it is difficult to get criminals and combatants to exit conflict/crime
4. Capital inputs are central to increasing self-employment in the poorest places
5. Ongoing incentives, including insurance, might work better than one-time transfers
 - E.g. cash for work, conditional cash transfers, guaranteed employment



NREGA: Largest social insurance program in world, deters spikes in Naxalite violence after bad rains

Fetzer (2014) shows that the rainfall-conflict relationship diminishes where the guaranteed work scheme was introduced

Ultimately, money or wages is a pretty narrow view of material selective incentives

Some examples

1. Protection from violence
 - In some wars, significant risk of violence as a civilian
 - Coercion and violence used as a selective incentive
2. Conscription
 - Armed groups often threaten violence to those who do not serve their interests
3. Access to sex
4. Access to “public goods”



Eli Berman: What can we learn from religious sects about material incentives?



“Club goods”: People can be excluded from community-provided public goods

- Government a poor provider of local public goods (education, public safety)
- The market is an inefficient provider of income and insurance
- Affiliation with kin, a tribe, or sect is a source of mutual insurance and public goods
 - Assistance when poor/sick
 - Access to education and health services



Why would sects prohibit common pleasurable behaviors and require sacrifices?

- This is costly, e.g.
 - Prohibited dress, food, sexual relations
 - Or requirements to destroy or sacrifice valuable property, or years of volunteer work
- 1. An enforceable form of taxation on secular activity, inducing members to work less and spend more time at religious activities with positive externalities
- 2. Separating device with there is imperfect information
 - Any religious sect that acts as social-service provision clubs has to discourage free-riders (adverse selection)
 - Sacrifice separates the sincere and committed types from the insincere and uncommitted types

Applying these insights to radical Islamic groups

- How to explain the Taliban practice of years of religious study that offers little training in marketable skills (or even combat skills)?
- A signaling mechanism adopted for the provision of other public goods allows Taliban to select members unlikely to defect or provide information to the enemy
- They attract people who derive intrinsic utility from the community or the cause
- Wages might attract opportunists



Many explanations for political behavior rely on intrinsic utility from the action

This begs the question of where this utility comes from and why it varies across people

Many forms of political participation are hard to explain with opportunity cost and selective incentives, and rely on intrinsic motivations



For example, what are the non-material club goods these groups provide?



I like talking about two other candidates for crime and violence reduction

1. Vengeance is its own reward
 - Bringing the grievance back in
2. Socialization
 - Skills and identity are malleable

I will cover #1 and see if we have any time for #2
(probably not)

When is fighting its own reward? “Grievances” over injustice and inequity

The Moral Economy of the Peasant

REBELLION AND SUBSTANCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

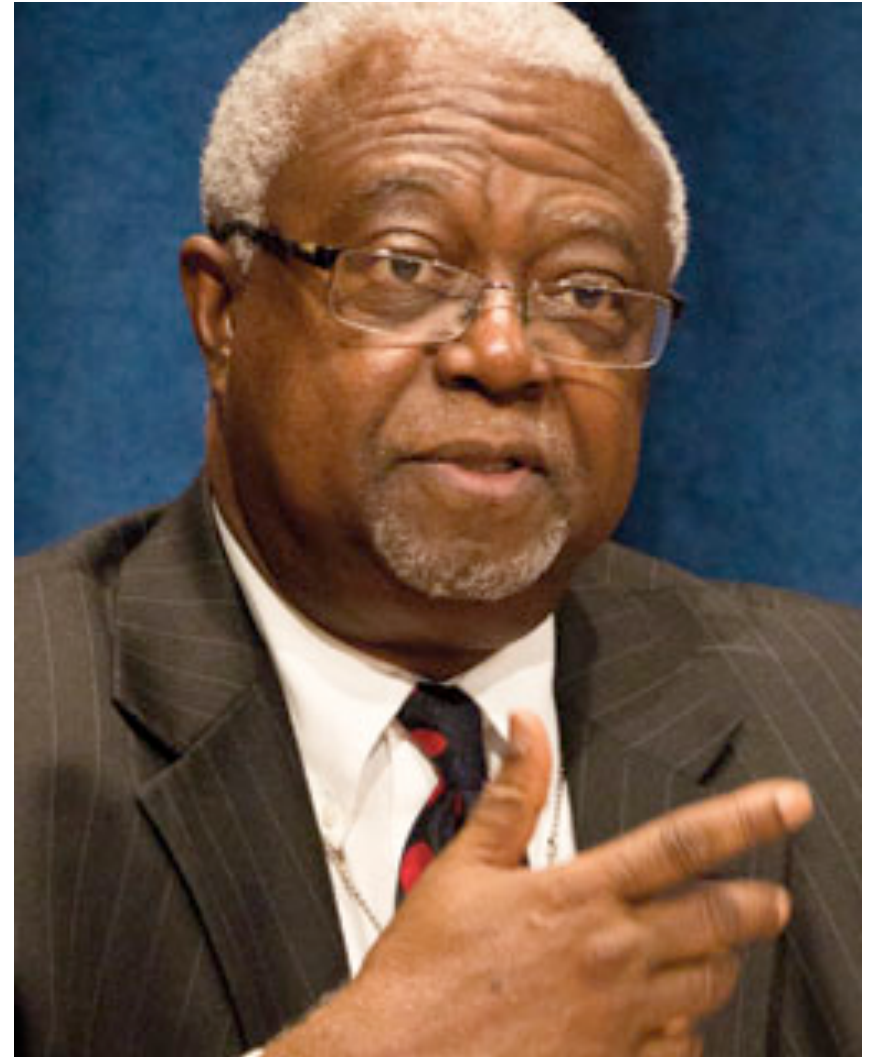


James C. Scott



“ *I follow those who argue that sustained marginalization and state-supported injustice have created conditions for the crisis and collapse that have become commonplace in post-colonial Africa*

—Amos Sawyer, *Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa*



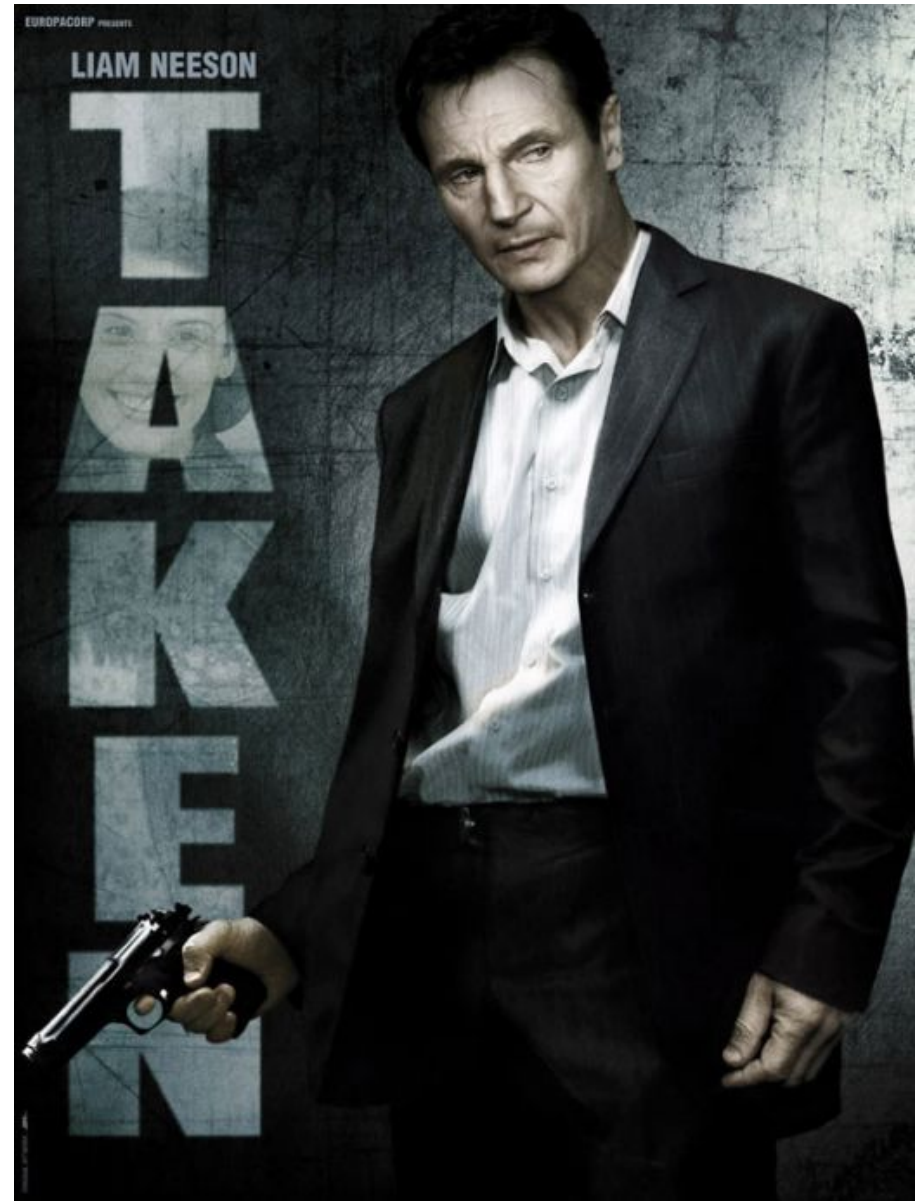
What makes us value participation for its own sake?

- Collective action is not a problem if we believe that taking action is intrinsically valuable
 - Pleasure from exercising agency (individual action)
 - Pleasure from acting collectively
 - Different than other-regarding preferences
- Examples
 - Voting and civic duty (or civic shame)
 - Satisfaction from protesting against injustice
 - Rebellion and revenge

A different example: El Salvador

Exposure to injustice motivates joining a rebellion

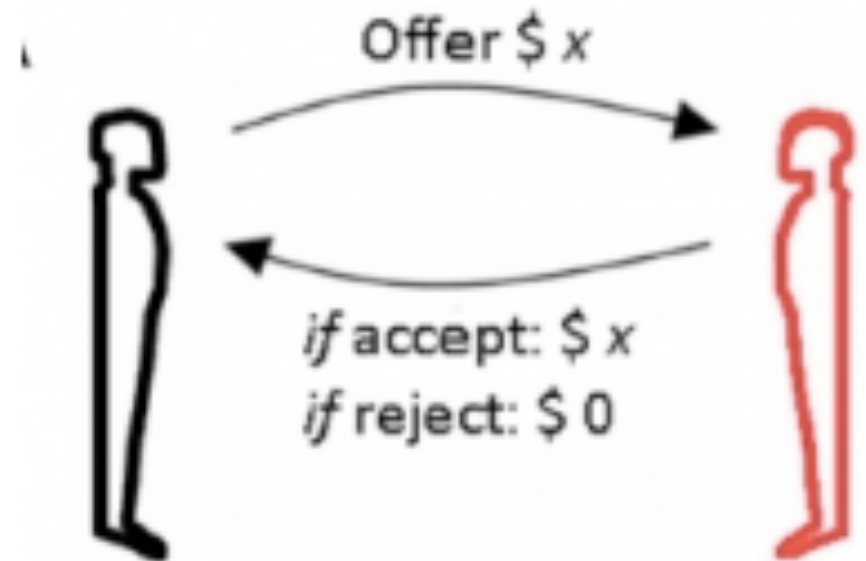




Do we have ingrained fairness norms?

Evidence from experimental games e.g. Fehr and Gächter 2000

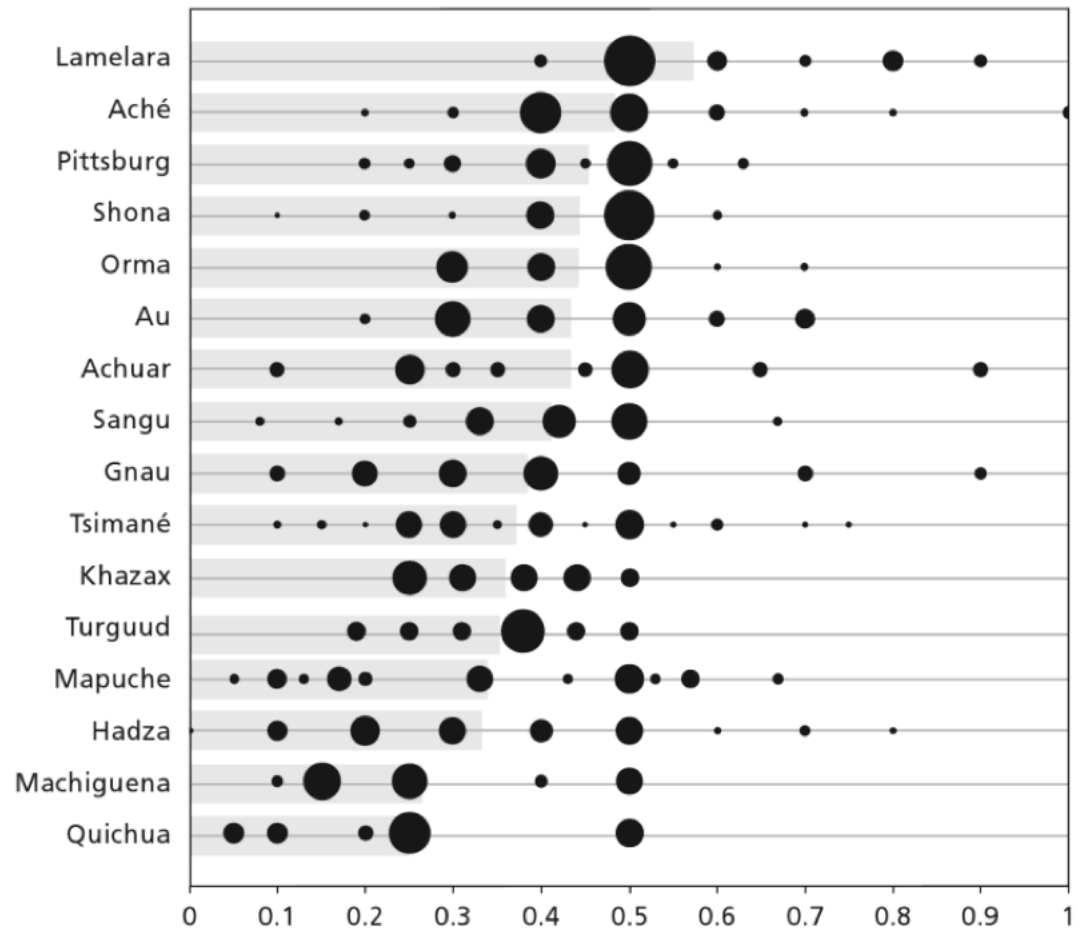
- “Dictator game”
 - Person A get $\$X$
 - A chooses $X \geq x \geq 0$ to give person B
 - Measures “altruism”
- Ultimatum game
 - Person A get $\$X$
 - A chooses $X \geq x \geq 0$ to give person B
 - B can choose whether to accept x or reject and both get 0
 - Measures “fairness”



Homo economicus?

Offer from an ultimatum game in 15 small scale-societies

- Great deal of similarity across time and populations, with offers of 40-50% common
- Offers less than 20% are frequently rejected
- Modal offer in a “Dictator Game” often zero, though average offer is typically 20-30%
- Both results suggest people act out of a sense of fairness and prosociality



Source: Henrich et al. 2004.

Note: The size of the bubble at each location along each row represents the proportion of the sample that made a particular offer. The right edge of the lightly shaded horizontal gray bar gives the mean offer for that group.

I like talking about two other candidates for crime and violence reduction

1. Vengeance is its own reward
 - Bringing the grievance back in
2. Socialization
 - Skills and identity are malleable

Armed groups invest in socialization

- Foster a sense of broader purpose and larger mission
 - The ethnic group
 - The political ideal
- They create new identities
 - Nom de guerre
 - Uniforms and insignia
 - Behavior
- They develop rituals that strengthen shared identity
- They strengthen social bonds with peers
- One objective is to get you to internalize the norms of the group (or the principal)



Some of the best evidence comes from programs that have tried to reverse socialize young men





STYL program in Liberia: A socialization program targeting self-control skills and identity (Blattman et al 2017)

8-week, \$200 cognitive behavior therapy fostered skills of self-discipline and emotional control, and “mainstream” identity and values

STYL: 1000 urban street youth

25%:
\$200 Grant

25%:
CBT

25%:
Grant
+ CBT

25%:
Control group

Ran as a randomized control trial



After 1 year, we see 20-50% decreases in crime, violence & anti-social attitudes

Effects are largest and strongest when men also received \$200 cash

But not because this increased employment.